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SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: DESPITE MASSIVE REFORMS COUNTRY STILL FALLS  
SHORT OF EDUCATION GOALS

¶1. Summary: In 2002, the Government of Burkina Faso (GOBF) and the donor community initiated a ten-year education development program, Programme Dcennal de Dveloppement de l'Enseignement de Base (PDDEB), which focused on construction of rural schools; recruitment and training of primary school teachers; capacity building for Ministry of Basic Education (MEBA) administrative staff; and free textbooks and supplies for schools nationwide. This program was designed to help Burkina Faso achieve its Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal primary education by 2015. In spite of this effort, MDG experts have concluded that the literacy rate will not reach the ten-year plan's 40 percent benchmark for 2009. End Summary.

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BACKGROUND  
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¶2. In July 2007, the Burkinabe Parliament passed a law intended to support the ten-year plan by overhauling the entire educational system from pre-school to university level. This law was designed to help the nation meet its MDG for 2015 by promoting free basic education for all Burkinabe children aged 6 to 16. The law also addressed other aspects of education such as practical and vocational training; adult literacy; life skills preparation; and adaptation of curricula to national job market needs. It also demanded institutional reforms such as improved quality and efficiency for the education sector. This new 1.8 trillion CFA (3.6 billion USD) program was initiated at the beginning of the 2007-08 school year.

¶3. Although the new law was favorably received by numerous stakeholders, many were doubtful about its chances of success. Many critics felt it was improbable that the GOBF would be able to mobilize the 1.8 trillion CFA (3.6 billion USD) needed to implement the reform. Secondly, many detractors doubted that the GOBF could compel parents to comply with mandatory education statutes. Thirdly, the country clearly lacked adequate facilities and qualified teachers capable of accommodating the sudden influx of new students. Finally, many also feared that widespread corruption and impunity in public administration had rendered the educational system incapable of carrying out this ambitious project.

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Progress on the Ground  
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¶4. Phase I of the ten-year plan, which began in 2002, focused on improvements in basic education and literacy. Phase II, which started in 2007 will build on Phase I goals on the premise that these factors have a more pervasive impact on the quality of life and the level of economic engagement. So far, the GOBF and the donor community have kept their promise to increase educational funding from 61 billion FCFA in 2002; to 120 billion FCFA in 2008 (76 percent was supplied by the national budget and 24 percent from external sources).

¶5. To date, improvement is slow but noticeable on several fronts. From 2002 to 2007, enrollment increased by 20.8 percent for pre-school; 10.7 percent for primary school; 10.1 percent for

secondary school, and 16.4 percent at the university level. More classrooms have been built, more teachers trained, and more money funneled into the system. In primary education, the gross admission rate (access to the first year of school) increased from 78 percent in 2007 to 85 percent in 2008. The gross enrollment rate (total number of school-age children in school) gained 9 percentage points, moving from 72 percent in 2007 to 81 percent in 2008. The school completion rate gained 4.3 percentage points, moving from 36.4 percent to 40.7 percent during the same period. In 2008, the textbook per student ratio improved to 1:1 from 2:1 in public schools; and adult literacy rates increased from 21.8 percent in 2003 to 28.7 percent in 2008.

¶16. The efficacy of the system, as measured by promotion, repeat and drop-out rates, also improved slightly. In 2008, for the six-year primary school program, student promotion rates were 88.5 percent for the first two years (CP), 82.5 percent for the next two years (CE), and 75 percent for the fifth year (CM1). Repeat rates were 6.8 percent, 11.8 percent and 20.9 percent, respectively. In 2008, the overall national drop-out rate was around 12 percent although in some places it was as high as 20 percent. An extreme example was in a village in the Sahel region's Yaga Province, which recently reported that all 46 students who enrolled in October 2008 had deserted the school by December 2008. In comparison, the MCC-funded Burkinabe Response to Improve Girl's Chances to Succeed (BRIGHT) program, which paired the construction of 132 schools with complementary interventions designed to increase girls' enrollment rates, shows significantly higher success rates. After three years, these schools boast a 95.2 percent attendance rate and 1.8 percent dropout rate.

¶17. Non-formal education and literacy training for adults has also made progress, moving from 23.2 percent in 2005 to 28.7 percent in 2007. To encourage enrollment in adult literacy programs, the GOBF engaged in a highly publicized advocacy campaign that would set an example. In January 2009, several cabinet ministers, with the Minister of Basic Education leading the way, began learning to read and write in their local dialects. (Reftel OUAGADOUGOU 215)

¶18. During the past two years, progress has been made in the fight against corruption and professional misconduct. Sanctions are increasingly reported in the press, and the Burkinabe are now more likely to mobilize in defense of their children's education. One well-publicized case concerned a rural school parent-teacher association that wrote to the Minister of Basic Education to complain that a teacher left his class during school hours to attend a ceremony at a nearby village. The second high profile story involved students at a provincial secondary school who succeeded in having an absentee teacher dismissed. A third case involved a primary school teacher who was immediately jailed for raping a student at his school.

#### ----- Challenges Remain -----

¶19. Despite marked improvements in many areas, some problems have proven difficult to overcome. Although MEBA added additional teachers to the payroll, it is impossible to keep up with growing school enrollments. From 2007 to 2008, the number of teachers increased by 8.7 percent but the student-teacher ratio also increased from an average of 1:54 in 2007 to 1:55 in 2008 (with 1:59 in urban areas). In some parts of the country, huge classes are not uncommon, sometimes reaching a ratio of 1:150.

¶10. The most challenging aspect of educational reform is implementation of the mandatory education policy for children aged 6 to 16. Compulsory education is difficult to enforce because of the lack of teachers, weak local authority, and extreme poverty that forces parents to withdraw their school-aged children so they can contribute to family income. Girls' education is the most problematic because some parents either force their daughters to marry at an early age (as young as 11-13 years old) or withdraw them from school once they reach puberty fearing an unwanted pregnancy. Religious misconceptions are also a barrier typical of the Sahel region, where many believe that "good Muslims do not attend school."

¶11. In spite of strong support for the ten-year plan, results continue to be discouraging. Following the conclusion of Phase I in 2007, the GOBF reported that the country had only achieved a literacy rate of 28.7 percent. In early 2009, a UN assessment of MDG progress concluded that "despite the perceptible increase that has been recorded over the past two years, the literacy rate in 2009 will not reach the target of 40 percent as established by the ten-year plan for the development of basic education."

¶12. Comment: The implementation of Phase II of the PDDEB is making progress. However, in terms of financial, human, and physical constraints (number of classrooms to be built, number of teachers and administrators to be trained), a school completion rate of 100 percent in 2015 appears to be unrealistic for Burkina Faso. In order to meet MDG for literacy, additional donor funding will be required to increase the quality and capacity of MEBA programs. To overcome the constraints imposed by poverty and tradition, MEBA programs should attempt to incorporate enrollment incentives, such as those provided by the BRIGHT schools.

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